

Seattle-to-Portland Amtrak alarm goes haywire: 'We didn't know if the train was about to blow up' (listen)

Oregon's new Cascades Amtrak Talgo 8 trains roll into Portland The Oregon Department of Transportation will open up one of the world's first Talgo 8 trains for public tours at Union Station in Portland on Saturday. The two trains, purchased with \$38.4 million in federal stimulus funds, will allow Amtrak to increase service in the Northwest.



By **Joseph Rose** | jrose@oregonian.com

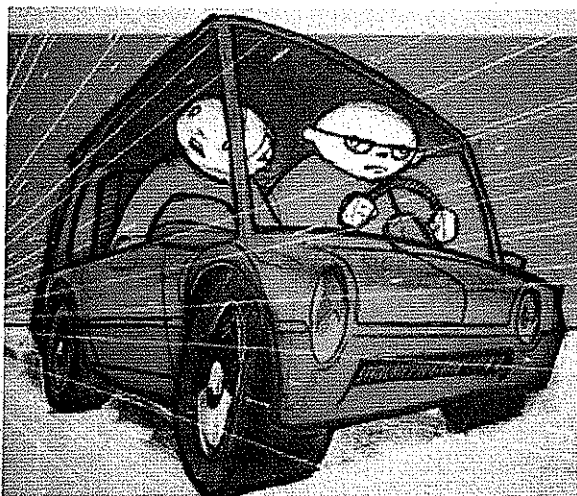
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The incessant electronic beeping that flooded **Amtrak Cascades 513** on Friday afternoon was more suited for a bad 1970s sci-fi movie than a leisurely train commute through the rainy Northwest.

But that didn't make it any less unnerving for a couple hundred riders taking what was reportedly one of the **Oregon Department of Transportation's new Talgo 8 trains** from Seattle to Portland.

In fact, Vancouver-based transportation consultant Todd Boulanger sent this email to Talgo America from his seat (he cc'd me):



Please help us!!!

We are trapped on your new train set (Amtrak Cascades 513, Oregon State DOT) with a warning beeping alert noise for 60 minutes. Help. No one at the Seattle Talgo maintenance office answers their phone.

He also sent an audio clip of the noise coming from the speaker next to his seat's headrest for nearly hour between Centralia and Vancouver.

Listen:

Or download [MP3 here](#).

Getting up to walk around, he said he spotted an Amtrak employee and a Talgo representative frantically looking through a train manual that said "draft" on the cover.

"They didn't know how to turn it off," Boulanger said in a phone interview. "We didn't know what it was; we didn't know if the train was about to blow up or what. But it was pretty obnoxious."

The warning tone was emanating from all of the public speakers on the train set, including the restrooms and bar, he said. The train was about 80 percent full.

These are the first Talgo passenger trains of their kind in the world. ODOT and Amtrak are counting on two new state-of-the-art trains, purchased with \$38.4 million in 2009 federal stimulus money, to expand daily commuter rail service between Portland and Eugene.

They went into service last fall.

Neither ODOT nor ~~Amtrak~~ returned phone calls to discuss the electronic warning tones.

While on the train, Boulanger attempted to contact Talgo representatives to see if they knew how to help the on-board staff diagnose the sound coming over the PA.

"No luck," he said. "I called the Seattle Talgo maintenance line and it went to voice mail and I left a message during office hours. I then tried the general number at the Talgo (headquarters) in Seattle but got lost in the phone tree."

He then sent the above email to Talgo. "I looked for an ODOT rail contact but then the WiFi got spotty and gave up," he said.

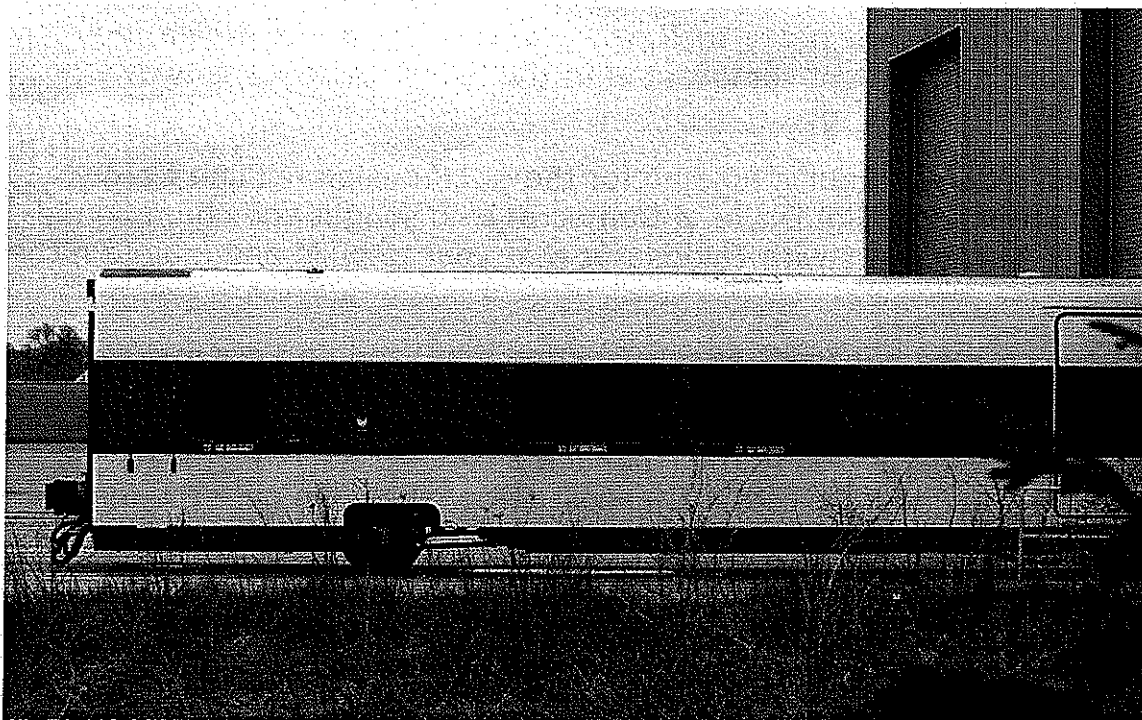
Eventually, Boulanger said, the Amtrak and Talgo employees began fiddling with the onboard electrical system.

Shortly before stepping off the train in Vancouver, Boulanger said a second set of beeps had started up.

"Everyone thought it was better but (it was) still a pain in the ear," he said. "As far as I know, it's still going off as the train heads to Eugene."

-- Joseph Rose

Talgo's \$66 million Wisconsin claim over high-speed trains rejected



The rail cars manufactured by Talgo in Milwaukee will be going elsewhere.

By *Patrick Marley* of the Journal Sentinel

May 19, 2014

Madison — A state board rejected a nearly \$66 million claim Monday from the company that manufactured a canceled Madison-to-Milwaukee train line, clearing the way for a lawsuit over a project that dominated the 2010 race for governor.

Seattle-based Talgo Inc., the U.S. arm of a Spanish trainmaker, said the state owed it \$65.9 million under agreements that were abandoned because of Gov. Scott Walker's campaign pledges.

Now that the Claims Board has unanimously thrown out the demand for payment, Talgo is free to sue in state court.

The payment Talgo is seeking comes on top of \$40 million the state has already paid the firm. In addition, Talgo contends Wisconsin owes bond holders another \$70 million because it borrowed that much for two train sets but never took possession of them.

The fight centers on train sets that were to be used for Amtrak's existing Hiawatha line from Milwaukee to Chicago, as well as for the proposed high-speed rail line from Milwaukee to Madison that eventually could have extended to Minneapolis.

The state Department of Transportation contends Talgo did not perform testing it was supposed to conduct. Also, it argues it is not obligated to pay any more for the trains because of a contract provision that says the state does not have to pay if lawmakers did not appropriate funds for the project.

Talgo counters that the state had other funds available and improperly invoked that contract provision. It says the state manufactured a disagreement over testing to serve the administration's political ends — a charge state officials deny.

DOT administrators have noted they never took possession of the trains, which they say do not meet specifications and are not compliant with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

In 2009, Wisconsin won federal stimulus funding for the \$810 million rail line from Milwaukee to Madison. Then-Gov. Jim Doyle, a Democrat who sought and championed the federal aid, reached agreements with Talgo later that year to build and maintain the trains.

The project would have created hundreds of construction jobs, and backers maintained it would have boosted the region's economy.

Walker, a Republican, made opposition to the train line a centerpiece of his 2010 campaign, saying it was a boondoggle that would cost state taxpayers over the long term. After Walker was elected, the federal government redirected the rail money from Wisconsin to other states because of Walker's promise to end the project.

Legal machinations began in 2012, when Talgo sued the state and asked a judge to declare that Talgo had the right to terminate its contract with the state and properly did so once the state stopped making payments. The move was an effort to make it easier for Talgo to sell the trains, and the litigation is ongoing.

In November 2013, Talgo filed its demand for payment with the Claims Board. Talgo had to take that step before it could file a lawsuit to try to get the money it says it is owed.

On Monday, the Claims Board released its 4-0 decision, which said the board "concludes this claim would be best resolved in a court of law."

Talgo's attorney, Lester Pines, said the board's decision to reject the claim was expected.

"Talgo is now considering what precisely it wants to do, and we'll make that decision in the not-too-distant future," Pines said.

Brian Hagedorn, Walker's chief counsel, sits on the Claims Board but did not participate in the decision on Talgo to avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest.

Those rejecting the claim were: Corey Finkelmeyer, an assistant attorney general and the chairman of the board; Greg Murray, chief counsel at Walker's Department of Administration; Sen. Luther Olsen (R-Ripon); and Rep. Pat Strachota (R-West Bend).

Olsen is not a member of the board, but he sat in for the meeting dealing with Talgo because its usual Senate representative, Sen. Joe Leibham (R-Sheboygan), was unavailable.

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